18: Dakeyne K-5 (1962-1964) 1969
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[A villager shows off the fighting head-dress of his father. It is intricately made of boar tusks, shells, feathers, and horn-bill beaks.]

THE YEGA OF NORTHERN PAPUA

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[161]

THE Yega is a group of nearly 900 people living in sixteen settlements, on an area of about twelve square miles, on the north coast of Papua. They live on a gently sloping alluvial plain between Mt Lamington and the sea. Yega territory is bounded by one large stream and crossed by several small creeks.

137 The plain was originally covered by mature rain forest 100-120 feet high, interspersed with elongated strips of grassland. Now, much of the original forest has been cut down, and secondary forest forty to fifty feet high has

132 replaced it. The climate is hot and wet throughout the year (Köppen Af.) but there is marked seasonality of precipitation. The north-west monsoon, November to April, brings two-thirds of the annual rainfall (average 100 inches per year); July and August with about four inches per month are relatively dry. The temperature is over 80°F on most days and rarely falls below 70°F on the coolest night, but the heat is alleviated by north-easterly sea breezes which blow during the afternoon and evening throughout the year.

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799 The first reported contact between Europeans and Yega was during an expedition along the coast by the Lt Governor of Papua, Sir William McGregor, in 1893, but the first real step in the process of change occurred with the establishment of an Anglican mission school on Waususu Point in 1909. From this time until the outbreak of World War II,

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464 Yega men began leaving their villages to work

466 [P.5-A)

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Fig. 7. *The New Guinea gardener's work tools, an axe, and large bush knife. The strong heavy spear is carried just in case he should see a wild pig. The cigarette, rolled with newspaper, is almost indispensable to most New Guineans* [276]

trunk of the sago palm which grows in wet or swampy ground. The sago is extracted by first cutting down the palm, then pounding up the fibre and washing out the starch. This passes through a coconut fibre screen into a settling tank. Four people can make 100 pounds of sago a day. [461]

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e) *Grass fires.* The origin and extension of tropical grasslands has long been a matter of debate. Large areas of grassland occur in Yega territory where villagers regard them as practically useless. Grasslands are extended by fire but only in special circumstances. Grassland fires seldom penetrate or destroy an area of mature rain forest or even areas of well-developed secondary growth. The danger period is the first two years after a swidden is abandoned. At this time there is a large quantity of grass and undergrowth amongst the young trees. If a fire spreads from adjacent grasslands to this highly inflammable material the young trees are destroyed. Being immature, they have not yet seeded and further forest regrowth is prevented. This circumstance is most likely to occur on the south-west margins of grassland areas where strong north-easterly

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[P.10-A]

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Fig. 8. *Bark-cloth (tapa). Each manufacturer has her own special designs traced in red and black dyes on the white material*

[P.11-B]